

January 2012 Book Reviews

***Flyaway* By Lucy Christopher**

As Isla and her father are running to try to divert a flock of whooper swans from flying into newly constructed power wires as they head for their winter pond, Dad falls and soon Isla is inside an ambulance racing to the hospital as paramedics tend to her ill father. As hospital visits and worry take over the lives of Isla, her brother and mother, she finds a friendship with Harry who is getting treatment in the juvenile cancer ward. Harry seems to have the same interest in swans as Isla and her father and is a good listener. As Harry & Isla discover a lone whooper on the lake outside Harry's window their relationship grows. Isla brings her homework assignment of creating a flying machine to the hospital where events surrounding her father, Harry and the lone swan unfold into an interesting story written for 5th grade and up. Will Isla's father make it through heart surgery? Will the lone whooper state to fly and find its flock? Will Harry's transplant be successful? These questions will keep the reader turning the pages of this interesting story. I would recommend this book for public and school libraries and for the animal/bird reader.

Pat Thompson WSC

Divergent

By Veronica Roth

In the future dystopian world of Chicago, society has broken itself into five factions, each dedicated to one virtue – honesty, selflessness, bravery, peace, and intelligence. When each child reaches sixteen, they have to make a decision – either stay with their family in the faction they are in or switch to another to be completely separated from them forever. It is Beatrice's turn. She knows she doesn't fit into Abnegation, the selfless faction in which she grew up. However, it is not until the choosing ceremony that she becomes a brave Dauntless. What follows is a brutal and competitive initiation which the newly named Tris must survive in order to become a true member of Dauntless. Along the way she discovers that she is Divergent toward the factions, meaning that she can easily carry more than one virtue and that it could mean death if anyone found out. Then, on top of all of her trials, she discovers that a war is coming – one that will put Dauntless (her new family) and Abnegation (her old family) against each other. When I first started reading this novel, it immediately made me think of Gardner's Intelligences or the Myers Briggs personality test. What would happen if we were divided up based on our strongest virtue? What if we had to suppress all other virtues? In the end, I think we would all be Divergent like Tris. I believe that this book would be best suited for high school and older. There are some rather bloody and graphic scenes during the Dauntless initiations that may disturb younger readers. Yet, I find myself drawn into this disturbing tale. There are lessons here to be learned.

-Valerie Knight, WSC

Prisoners in the Palace

By Michaela MacColl

This novel is set in 1836 in London just before young Victoria takes the throne of Great Britain. Liza, a seventeen-year-old debutant, is left penniless after losing both of her parents in a carriage accident. She applies for a position at the run-down Kensington Palace and becomes Princess Victoria's lady's maid. What she thinks will be a straight-forward position is complicated as each member of the household expects something different from Liza. Victoria wants a friend and confidant. The Baroness wants Liza to spy on Victoria's mother and Sir John who want Victoria's throne for themselves. Then there is the little Inside Boy who lives in a wood box in the palace who wants Victoria to help the previous lady's maid who was dismissed under suspicious reasons. Plus, there is the reporter who wants news from the palace – any kind of news that will sell papers. Liza must maintain her balance between all these individuals as she seeks to secure both her own future and that of her future Queen. *Prisoners in the Palace* is an entertaining look into the intrigue that surrounded Victoria's life before she took the throne. It could easily be paired with the movie, *The Young Victoria*, to provide interesting and thought-provoking discussions. High school and advanced middle school readers will enjoy both the intrigue and romance of the novel. Parts of real diary entries from Princess Victoria are included along with an author's note with lists for future reading.

-Valerie Knight, WSC

The Declaration

By Gemma Malley

In 2140, everyone lives forever. That is what the drug Longevity does. Of course that creates some problems – like a population explosion. So, if you take the drug (and everyone does), you sign the Declaration agreeing not to have children. However, children are born. These Surpluses are either killed outright or sent to homes like Grange Hall. Anna was sent there when she was two. Her entire grim life has been dedicated to paying back society for her existence, to become a Valued Asset. Surpluses are made to live with no heat, eating only the most basic of food, attempting to make no impact on Legal society. However, when Peter is sent to Grange Hall at the age of sixteen, Anna's world is turned upside down as he tries to convince her that there is nothing wrong with being a Surplus and that her parents love her and want to rescue her. In the end, they attempt an escape, risking their own lives and the lives of others in an attempt to reclaim a real and significant life. Intended for high school youth and young adults, this extremely thought-provoking tale will keep you up late reading and thinking about the implications of a world without death. Do we have the right to live forever? When does forever become too long? What are the rights of the young? You will be thinking about Anna and Peter long after you put this one down.

-Valerie Knight, WSC

The Resistance

By Gemma Malley

In the sequel to *The Declaration*, we return to 2140, where everyone lives forever because of the drug Longevity. Peter, Anna, and Anna's younger baby brother are all Legal now because each of their parents died, making each of them no longer Surplus. They have set up house and are trying to live normal lives – or as normal a life is when everyone is at least 50 years older than you and where you cannot walk outside without being stared at. Peter integrates himself with the Resistance, agreeing to infiltrate his grandfather's company, Pincent Pharma, in order to gain intelligence about Longevity and the new Longevity+ that not only slows old age but reverses it. What he discovers behind closed doors is even more dreadful than he could imagine. Longevity+ requires stem cells in order to work, stem cells from the youngest of all – babies. In order to harvest them, they are willing to do anything, including impregnating worthless Surpluses over and over again until they are no longer useful. Peter must find a way to stop his grandfather while protecting his new and growing family. As thought-provoking and chilling as its predecessor, *The Resistance* makes you think about ethics and science in a whole new way. What is a human being? What are their rights? When does a human no longer become a human? Normally these questions are asked of the unborn. But, this book takes flips it on its head and takes it one step further as we examine the rights, or lack thereof, of an unwanted surplus population - the extra, the unwanted, the unclean, the undesirable - whatever its classification. High school teachers could easily match this book to other controversial topics ranging from abortion to genocide.

-Valerie Knight, WSC

The Ausländer

By Paul Donswell

Blond haired and blue eyed Peter was sent to an orphanage in Warsaw, Poland after his parents were killed. The Nazis are looking for youth just like Peter, those of German blood. So, they send him to Berlin where a prominent German family is waiting to adopt him. While living there, Peter must learn to adapt to the Nazi German ways of doing things and bury his Polish upbringing. At first he is enamored by the Nazi party and their goals. However, as his life is restricted more and more and as he begins to see the travesties around him, Peter realizes he does not want to be a Nazi. What is Peter willing to risk to gain his freedom? This book will give middle and high school students a different perspective on World War II and Nazi occupied Germany by showing them how Germans themselves viewed the war and the Nazi party. This book is an excellent read.

-Valerie Knight, WSC

Akata Witch

By Nnedi Okorafor

Sunny is a contradiction. She is a West African albino who was born in the U.S. but living in Nigeria. It has always been hard for her to fit in. That was until she met Chichi and discovered that she was actually a member of the Leopard People, a hidden people latent with magical abilities. Suddenly Sunny finds herself in a new world where chittim (curved rods of copper, bronze, silver, and gold) fall out of the sky when you learn something new and where teachers send you into deadly situations to test you, not knowing if you will survive the test. Just as Sunny is starting to get the hang of all the juju, shape changing and spells she needs to know, the magical authorities tell Sunny and their friends that they need to track down a serial killer. Sunny and her friends must learn to trust each other as they venture into danger. This is the African version of Harry Potter – but not. In both, an outcast discovers a magical world and must rise to the occasion to save it. Only, magic in Africa is nothing like magic in England. There isn't a big castle-like boarding school for Sunny and her friends. They have to learn in secret in the middle of the night. Plus, no one is trying to keep Sunny and her friends safe. However, *Akata Witch* is an exciting and well-written tale that will excite middle school readers as much as Harry Potter. Plus, it is an opportunity to learn more about African culture, mythology, and beliefs.

-Valerie Knight, WSC

The Water Seeker

By Kimberly Willis Holt

Amos is a water seeker. He can use a dowsing rod to discover water for wells. However, it is his secret. His father, Jake, is a water seeker who hates being a water seeker. He'd rather be exploring the West and trapping Beavers than dowsing wells for farmers. After Amos is born and his mother dies, Jake leaves Amos with his brother. Amos develops a deep attachment with his aunt who eventually succumbs to small pox. When Jake returns with his new wife, Blue Owl, Amos leaves the only home he knows to follow his father on dowsing trips that eventually lead to being a part of a wagon train on the Oregon Trail. Along the way, Amos finds love and learns to accept his dowsing abilities. Both middle school and high school readers would enjoy this book. At the beginning of the book is a map of the Oregon Trail with major stopping points indicated during the story. However, if one were to read this intending to learn more about the Oregon Trail, be aware that it is only told toward the end of the story and does not seem to be a major development in the story. There is also an element of fantasy involved with Amos' dead mother who seems to come back as a ghost of sorts, heralding birds wherever her spirit is. I for one would not miss that plot device if it were eliminated.

-Valerie Knight, WSC

Possum Summer

By Jen K. Blom

P, short for Princess, would love to have a pet of her own. But her father, who is on duty in Iraq, says every animal on their Oklahoma farm needs to have a purpose and earn their keep. She tries to befriend and train her dad's cattle dog, Blackie, (against his directions) and turn him into a pet, with surprising results. After Blackie kills a mother possum orphaning her baby, P jumps at the chance to save the baby and make him her pet. However, she must do it secretly. She names him Ike and he becomes her constant companion. The eleven-year old P rigs up one of her older sister's bras to carry and conceal Ike and takes him everywhere, even school and church. But her Grandma figures out what P is doing and her dad is coming home soon. Can P get Ike ready to go back to the wild and meet her Grandma's time line to do so? This book is recommended for grades 2-4 and any library collection. This is a fun story! P is a tom boyish go-getter and her antics with Ike are very enjoyable. There's a little bit of danger incorporated into the story as there is a rabies epidemic in the area where P's family lives. She has a friendship with a neighbor boy which contributes some fun to the story as well. I would recommend this. There might be a little bit of "ick" or "ooh" factor when kids read that P has to feed Ike and help him go to the bathroom until he is able to do so by himself, but told in a fun way. P's description of getting the bra ready to use to carry Ike will get some chuckles out of readers. This is a very entertaining story.

Deb Daehnke

Little House on the Prairie

By Laura Ingalls Wilder

Laura and her family travel from their home in the Big Woods of Wisconsin to the Kansas prairie or to Indian country as Laura calls it. Laura relates their family's travels to Kansas, homesteading, building their house and barn, starting their crops, and many of the ways in which they have to build or grow everything they need. She also tells of their relations and fears with the nearby Indians and the subsequent government orders to move and leave their house behind. This book is recommended for middle school readers and for any library collection. This is a hardcover edition celebrating the 75th anniversary of Laura Ingalls Wilder's classic story. The illustrations of Garth Williams are well done and fit the story. If you are looking for either a copy or new copy of this fun story, this book shouldn't disappoint. Even though I've read the stories and probably watched all the TV episodes, it was fun to read this again in the original way it was told by Laura.

Deb Daehnke

Pie

By Sarah Weeks

The time frame is the 1950's. The setting is a small town of Ipswitch, Pennsylvania whose claim to fame was their famous resident Polly Portman the National Pie winner thirteen times. After the sudden death of Polly it is soon discovered that Aunt Polly left her pie recipe to Lardo and Lardo the cat was left to the care of her favorite young niece Alice. As Alice and half the town tries to figure out Polly's secret recipe the adventures begin with Alice and her friend Charlie trying to figure out answers. There is the ransacking of the pie shop and Polly's upstairs apartment, the disappearance of Lardo and then the discovery that Lardo ate sleeping powder. Written for 4th grade and up there will be adults that enjoy this story as the author has also added many of Aunt Polly's pie recipes and woven fun and adventure throughout the volume. Take a nostalgia trip back in time by picking up this book at your public or school library.

Pat Thompson WSC

Hooper Finds A Family

By Jane Paley

This Hurricane Katrina dog's survival tale is based upon true facts and is told from the dog's point of view. The book starts out in Louisiana and the puppy's name is Jimmy whose owners have spoiled him good. As the storm and rains approaches, George takes Mamma to safety with a promise to return for Jimmy, but alas the storm is too severe and soon Jimmy is trying to find dry land. Jimmy lands on a roof top and is then rescued from his perch by a man in a boat and wearing a yellow coat. Jimmy is shifted from shelter to shelter until one day he takes a ride and meets up with a couple who snap on a leash and travel to New York City where their home is located. Jimmy who has been renamed Hooper starts adjusting to many new concept such as a little boy to play with, walks in the dog park, and meeting many new friends. This heartwarming story is filled with valuable life lessons on hope, courage, making the best of situations, and love. The volume contains pictures of the real Hooper a rescued dog and has some interesting notes at the end. Written for 3rd grade and up the adult that reads this to their child will enjoy it too.

Pat Thompson WSC

Willy and May: A Christmas Story

By Judy Schachner

A young girl has a unique relationship with her eccentric aunt whom she visits twice a year. The summer and Christmas visits were filled with memory-making activities. Unfortunately, family illness prevents the usual visits so Aunt May decides to visit the young girl instead at Christmas time. When it looks like a winter storm will prevent Aunt May from coming she shows up having hitched a ride from Santa. This book is recommended for ages 4-9, for all libraries. This charming book would make a great read aloud. Although it is subtitled 'A Christmas Story', the focus is upon the relationship between the girl and her elderly aunt. This makes the story's appeal much broader and would be appreciated to read anytime of the year.

Latricia Olson

Grandpappy Snippy Snappies

By Lynn Plourde

A suspender wearing Grandpappy is able to solve problems and rescue those in need with a snap of his suspenders. However, when his suspenders drag and droop and lose their stretch, Grandpappy loses his super hero-like powers to be of assistance. Quick thinking on Grandpappy's part helps him to once again save the day. This book is recommended for ages 3-7 years. Although the book has a clever premise it is somehow unsatisfying. Perhaps it is because Grandpappy solves his dilemma too quickly. However, the artwork is expressive and younger children would enjoy it. The book may be best suited as a read aloud for an expressive reader.

Latricia Olson

Critter Sitter

By Chuck Richards

Henry has started his own critter sitter business and his neighbors, the Mahoneys, are his first paying customers. After assuring them that he is up to the challenge of caring for snake, cat, dog, bird and fish all mayhem breaks out as each animal escapes and problems abound as Henry tries to bring the situation under control. Just in time, Henry is able to restore order and the Mahoney's are so delighted with his job performance that they hire him for another job. This book is recommended for ages 4-9 in all libraries. This book would make a fun read aloud at home or in the classroom. Children would be delighted to read about Henry's escapades and near misses as he strives to bring the pets back under control and deals with one zany situation after another.

Latricia Olson – reviewer

Sylvia Jean, Scout Supreme

By Lisa Campbell Ernst

Sylvia Jean loves Pig Scouts more than anything and enthusiastically participates in all of her troop's activities. When challenged to earn her Good-Deed Badge, she decides to choose to assist her neighbor, Mrs. Van Hooven, who is suffering with a sprained ankle. When her overly enthusiastic good-deed doing causes Sylvia to be banned from helping her neighbor, Sylvia hatches her new plan for accomplishing her goal. Donning daily disguises she discovers unique ways to help her neighbor and earn her badge. This book is recommended for K-3 in all types of libraries. Lisa Campbell Ernst has once again written a charming book that will especially resonate with adults and children who have participated in scouting activities. The book is also a salute to creativity and imagination and perhaps will inspire young readers to imitate Sylvia Jean by dressing up and assuming new identities when playing.

Latricia Olson

I Want to Be Free

By Joseph Slate

This historical fiction poem is a powerful look at the spirit and courage of the African American willing to risk severe physical harm and/or death to run; run to freedom. Along with the adventure of the quest for freedom the story has such a feeling tone. There is the fear and hatred of the Big Man, along with the powerful opposite emotion of love, love for another and in the spirit above. The story is set up as a young child's picture book, K-4th grade, yet anyone who reads this could easily be moved by the emotion and lesson of the poem. The illustrations tell just as much of the account as the text. Children who pick this story up will be introduced to the past and how people were treated. It would be a great source for discussion with an adult in a school or public library setting.

Jane Dodson

Year of the Tiger

By Alison Lloyd

It is the year of the tiger in ancient China. The Great Wall is crumbling at the edge of the empire near Beicheng, and the barbarians are threatening to attack. The soldiers of the Tiger Battalion have been sent to repair the wall so as to prevent an invasion. When the battalion commander suggests an archery contest his son Ren sees it as a chance to prove his worth to his father. To Hu, a peasant's son, it is a chance to help make life a little easier. Little do they realize that when they join forces to practice that not only do they form an unlikely friendship, but that they will end up working together to help protect Beicheng from the barbarians. Here is an action packed book that will have young male readers asking for more. Reading level is 4th through 7th grade.

Diane Limoges

The Best Bad Luck I Ever Had

By Kristin Levine

This story takes you back to 1917, a time when you couldn't be friends with just anyone. That is if you cared about what other people thought, or what they would do to you if they found out you were friends with "one of them." Dit never intended to end up in this situation. All he knew was that there was a new postmaster coming and he had a boy his same age. Turns out he heard wrong. The colored family who stepped off the train had a child Dit's age, but she was not what he was expecting. Disappointed, Dit still does what he's told and helps the new family with their luggage and since they lived so close together, he also had to entertain his new "friend" per mama's request. Emma was not at all like Dit. She was not into baseball, fishing, climbing, or anything fun. She just liked to read, and she was very smart. Although the two had little in common, life threw them together and it turns out they made each other think. Before they realize it themselves, they become fast friends, a situation that gets Dit into a handful of trouble with his white friends. Dit learns that sometimes in life you are faced with hard situations and you have to choose what you are going to do; take the easy way out, or stand up for what you believe is right. He gets involved with the differences between blacks and whites, not only with Emma but with other colored folks he has become friends with. For instance, when the town barber is put on trial for a terrible crime and is unjustly convicted to hang. Together Dit and his best friend, Emma, come up with a daring plan to save him. This historical fiction piece would be a great addition to a school or public library. The book is written for the 4th grade level on up, but with the content of black and white relationships, and "first love" it would lend itself better to be a read aloud or discussion book with the younger reader. It is well written and pulls the reader into the time period and what life experiences were like for some people during that era.

Jane Dodson

Abigail Iris, The Pet Project

By Lisa Glatt and Suzanne Greenberg

Abigail Iris has a half-birthday coming and she thinks this is the perfect time to get a pet kitten. As all the family members think it's a great idea, Abigail gets her kitten. When they find out that Abigail's sister is allergic to cats they have to find a new home for Spot. Abigail learns that sometimes things do not go the way you want. The main point of this story is about getting the pet you always wanted and then not being able to keep it. A 4th or 5th grade reader would find the reading pretty juvenile. There are also so many things going on in this story (a new pet, a new baby, divorce and combined families) that at times you wonder what the main point of the story is. Once again you have to wonder whose decision it is to qualify books for the Accelerated list. This book is for reading levels 2nd through 3rd grade.

Linnell Quinn

The Boy with Pink Hair

By Perez Hilton

Anyone can make a difference if you believe in yourself. A young boy who is different from everybody else proves just because you're different, doesn't mean you can't do something great to make people change their opinions of you. This book is recommended for lower elementary in both school and public libraries. This book has bright, colorful illustrations throughout. This would be a great book for the guidance counselor to use for lower elementary classes. It would benefit the child who is different and help others realize everyone is special somehow.

Kristy Wittler

Freedom Stone

By Jeffrey Kluger

Part fantasy and part historical fiction, Freedom Stone is Lillie's account of her struggles to gain her family's freedom from slavery during the Civil War. Along with help from Bett, the elderly slave with magical Ibo Powers, Lillie goes back in time to find her father who has fought and died for the Confederate Army. Her father had been promised his family's freedom, and then had that right taken away when he had been accused of stealing. Lillie, who knew that her father would not have done such a thing, was determined to discover the truth, clear her father's name, and prevent her younger brother from being sold to another master. This book is recommended for grade level 6th and up, in both school and public libraries. Freedom Stone contains an Author's Note that references historical works used for research, and might make for additional, though not necessarily easy reading. The combination of fantasy and historical fiction may be a little disconcerting for some readers. However, for those who give it a chance, this book contains enough exciting passages to keep readers hooked and waiting to see what happens next. Although not based on a true story or significant contribution to society, this tale would be an interesting addition to reading lists during Black History Month.

MeMe Smith, Schuyler Public Library

Livvie Owen Lived Here

By Sarah Dooley

14-year-old Livvie is autistic. Once again she and her family find themselves looking for a new place to rent. Each time they seem to get settled the neighbors start complaining about the excess noise from Livvie when things don't fall within her routine and/or when she wakes from a nightmare. Though Livvie's parents and siblings love her, the stress of always trying to find a new place to live where they are accepted has become stressful. This book is recommended for grade levels 5th through 8th. The idea behind this book is great. The story itself is boring with no plot. If you need a good nap this is the book for you because it will put you to sleep whenever you try to read it.

Diane Limoges

My Life with the Lincolns

By Gayle Brandeis

Imagination is something that Mina Edelman has plenty of. She believes that her family is the reincarnated family of Abe Lincoln. During the summer of 1966 her Dad, owner of Honest Abe's furniture store, takes her with him to Martin Luther King, Jr. rallies. He is convinced that it is his responsibility to help the Civil Rights movement. Although there are more similarities between both "Honest Abes," there are also numerous differences. The more absorbed her father becomes with the movement and its activities, Mina sees him also become involved with one of the female participants in the activities. She sees her father, Honest Abe, lie to her mother and her family life changes dramatically. This book is recommended for grades 5th and up, in both school and public libraries. While the storyline is somewhat convoluted, it contains a good amount of youthful humor along with the serious subject matter. It will hold the interest of those interested in the Civil Rights movement, social injustice, and/or those who struggle with changing family dynamics. This is the author's first novel for children.

MeMe Smith, Schuyler Public Library

Timelock

By David Klass

Jack is torn between two worlds: his suburban life, his girlfriend P.J., and his destiny to rule 1000 years in the future with Eko his queen. He's been kidnapped and sent to the future to save his father from the Dark Lord, then transported back to save the Polar Ice Caps. Can he save mankind from itself? This book is good for both school and public libraries. This sends a "save the planet" message to all people. Take care of the earth so it can take care of you. This book has a good balance of reality and fantasy to hold the interest of readers. The character of the magician is very compelling and you want to know more.

Lenell Quinn, Winside

Adventure Annie Goes to Kindergarten

By Toni Buzzes

Adventure Annie is the spark of enthusiasm that wants to live in each one of us. Annie starts her first day of Kindergarten prepared for any adventure. She is introduced to the "golden rules" and struggles with her interpretations of proper conduct. Annie understands her teacher is there to lead her down the right path. Annie volunteers to find the two lost students with the help of her trusty walkie-talkies. At the end of the day, she is rewarded with the Gold Star we all are happy that Annie gets to retain her uniqueness. This story is good for both school and public libraries. The illustrations of Annie add dimension to her personality. This girl reminds me of D.J. from the Arthur stories. We want to root for Annie, pray that her teacher appreciates her zeal for life, and revel in her reward.

Lenell Quinn, Winside

Franny Parker

By Hannah Roberts McKinnon

Franny's Grandma is stiff, her sister is shallow, and her life is dull. Then new neighbors arrive and she starts an animal hospital in the barn and her whole world changes. During this magical summer, Franny finds the true meaning of family and survival. Lucas will need her help, the animals need constant care, and there really is magic that can bring rain to save drought laden farmland. This book is good for any library collection. This resembles The Painted House story. Secrets, decisions, helping your fellow men, tradition and perseverance are all themes in this book. I want every middle school student to read Franny Parker. When people pull together our community is better and stronger.

Lenell Quinn